

Free Your Inner Hamster

Characters: The Managing Director
The Marketing Manager
Product Design Manager

Props: A box of doughnuts; a flipchart or PowerPoint presentation

[Scene – the boardroom of ÜberMega-GigantoCorp Affiliates Limited International. A box of doughnuts sits in the centre of the table, around which sit the three characters.]

M.D. : Gentlemen – thank you for joining me. You both know why we're here.

DESIGN : Ah...no...no, we don't.

M.D. : Oh. Well, in that case...

[Whilst M.D. begins to explain, MARKETING reaches out for a doughnut.]

M.D. : Hands off!

MARKETING *[surprised]*: What?

M.D. : Those are *my* doughnuts.

MARKETING : But we always have doughnuts in board meetings!

M.D. : Not any more. These are my *personal* doughnuts. The company can't afford to provide everyone with doughnuts. In this new economic climate, only employees in pay grade 1 are allowed doughnuts.

DESIGN : Pay grade 1?

M.D. : Me. Any more questions?

MARKETING : What new economic climate?

M.D. : We're about to go bankrupt.

[Sharp intakes of breath from the other two.]

M.D. : Now, you know what this means. Our livelihoods...*your* livelihoods...are on the line here. We need ways to boost our profits. Ideas?

DESIGN : How about *not* giving the board huge bonuses all the time?

M.D. : This is no time for jokes. I need suggestions.

MARKETING : I suggest a bigger marketing budget.

DESIGN : You would – you're head of marketing.

MARKETING [*ignoring him*]: We need to imagineer a new synergistic paradigm to leverage our brand recognition to a higher awareness rating in the ABC1 demographic. We need blue-skies thinking.

[*Blank looks from the other two.*]

MARKETING : We need a new product.

M.D. : Exactly what I was going to say. That's why I made you head of marketing. [*Shows first image on powerpoint presentation or flipchart*] Sales of our existing products are decreasing rapidly. [*A very obvious straight line is either drawn or appears*] For example – our Deluxe RadioMatic SuperOven...

DESIGN : Yes, I've been meaning to talk to you about that. It seems that in the rush to get it onto the shelves, someone decided that it could do without safety features.

M.D. : What do you mean?

DESIGN : Well, eight out of ten users found that their meals glowed in the dark.

M.D. : Eight out of ten isn't too bad...

DESIGN : The other two couldn't even turn the thing on. The instruction manuals were all in Japanese.

MARKETING : We had them translated.

DESIGN : Yes. Into Finnish.

M.D. : Ahem...yes, well, that's beside the point. As I've said, our sales figures look like this. What we want them to look like is this: [*the next graph shows increasing sales, possibly surrounded by pictures of pound-signs, pots of money, very happy looking men in suits*]. We need a new product.

MARKETING : I'm way ahead of you, sir. What we do is: we convince people it fulfils some basic need – some problem they didn't even know they had.

M.D. : I'm glad you said that...because I have a solution. A solution to the greatest problem facing the modern world!

DESIGN : Poverty? War? Famine?

MARKETING : Spam emails?

M.D. : No, no, no. But speak to me later about that last one – you might have something there.
Ahem. I'm talking about the search for...the *it factor*.

MARKETING : Isn't that my line?

M.D. [*ignoring him*]: Everyone is searching for that long-delayed but always expected something that we live for. Always seeking that elusive *something*, always striving and never getting anywhere.

MARKETING : Yes... the stress of modern life. The crushing boredom of our humdrum daily routine. [*Starts talking in slogans*] “Struggling with stress? Tired of tedium? Is your life just a daily grind?”

DESIGN : A find a good book often helps.

MARKETING : You need...you need...[*realises he’s missing one vital part of his ad campaign*] What *is* the actual product?

DESIGN : It needs to be something easy to use, simple...

M.D. : No, no, no. It needs to have *features*. [*Grand gesture*] May I present, the all-new...

MARKETING : [*Approving noises*]

DESIGN : Umm...

M.D. : Feature-packed...

MARKETING : [*More approving noises*]

DESIGN : I did suggest that a *simple*...

M.D. : Flatpacked...

DESIGN : I’m not sure that’s a very good...

M.D. : [*unveils next slide/image. The words “StressBuster 3000” appear in very large letters*] StressBuster 3000!

MARKETING : Yes!

DESIGN [*despairing*]: No...

MARKETING : It’s brilliant! The name alone will have them up at the crack of dawn to get in their pre-orders. They’ll be fighting in the streets.

DESIGN [*sarcastic*]: Some might say that, for a stress-reducing device, that wouldn’t be a very good start.

Anyway, I’m not sure this is going to work. People don’t want another mass-produced product. That won’t change their lives.

MARKETING : Hey – I’m the one who’s supposed to tell people what they want.

M.D. : And what they want is... this!

[*He unveils his design – a giant hamster wheel connected to various gadgets and gizmos. MARKETING gives a gasp of amazement and wonder. DESIGN gives a gasp of horror.*]

MARKETING : It’s amazing. I can see the campaign now – “do you feel like a hamster”?

DESIGN : What, soft and furry?

MARKETING : “Trapped on the treadmill of life? Escape from the stress of the modern world with the StressBuster 3000. Free your inner hamster!”

DESIGN [*despairingly*]: Give me strength...

MARKETING : Great slogan!

M.D. : Excellent. That’s agreed then.

DESIGN : Um...no.

M.D. : What do you mean?

DESIGN : I mean it just can’t be done.

M.D. : Here at ÜberMega-GigantoCorp Affiliates Limited International, we don’t know the meaning of the word “can’t.”

[*MARKETING reaches for doughnuts. M.D. slaps his hand away.*]

M.D. : What are you doing?

MARKETING : Well, you said I “can’t” have any of the doughnuts...

DESIGN : *Coming back to the point...* this “StressBuster” thing is just more of the same. The same frantic emptiness; the same constant need to buy, buy, buy.

M.D. : Exactly.

DESIGN : What?

M.D. : We can’t give people something that doesn’t leave them wanting more! Otherwise we’d never sell any Disposable Golf-Club Tidies or Single-Use Leatherette-Effect Doorstops. If we sold something that *actually* fulfilled them, then where we would be? It would be the end of the economy as we know it!

DESIGN : That might be a good stress buster.

M.D. : Come on – people will flock to buy this product. No-one’s ever offered them a chance like this before.

DESIGN : Actually, they have.

M.D. : What? Who? What product?

DESIGN : It wasn’t a product, it was a person. Two thousand years ago, there was a man who said, “Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

M.D. : That’s not a very catchy slogan. I think it’s best if we stick to the hamster liberation angle. Right – that’s decided, then. See you next Tuesday.

[*All stand. M.D. picks up doughnuts and leaves; DESIGN picks up papers from the table. MARKETING hangs back to talk to him.*]

MARKETING : So, ah...this guy you were talking about...who was he?

DESIGN : Let me introduce you to him.

[Exeunt MARKETING and DESIGN.]

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